

Book reviews

Caring and curing: a philosophy of medicine and social work

R S Downie and E Telfer London, Methuen, 1980, 174 pp £3.95

In recent years a number of disciplines outside the traditional range of biological sciences have staked modest claims in the medical curriculum. At a time of impressive developments in the natural sciences, claims of relevance to medicine by any new discipline need to appear very convincing indeed to achieve a sympathetic audience. This book is an attempt to demonstrate the value of philosophy not only to medical practitioners, but to the other 'caring professions' such as social work. The authors present their text as having two purposes - to introduce the reader to philosophy and to offer a philosophy of the caring professions.

The first chapter provides a discussion of the values and aims embodied in the professions of medicine and social work. This primarily revolves around a conceptual analysis of the meaning of 'health' and 'welfare'. The second chapter analyses some of the major moral principles which are claimed to govern the caring professions. They tease out the ethical issues that lie behind the apparent incompatibility of active concern for the welfare of the client and a respect for his liberty.

They then move into the realms of political philosophy and draw out a wide range of implications behind the moral advocacy of *laissez-faire*, pluralist and socialist systems of providing care. Their fourth chapter can be taken as an introduction to the philosophy of science in which the epistemological basis of the natural and social sciences are examined in turn, and it is concluded that the social sciences are of only limited value in training the professions to deal with individuals. The last chapter argues that the caring professions are, by virtue of their responsibilities, particularly com-

pelled to consider questions regarding the meaning of life and the meaningful life. A brief discussion concludes that a meaningful life in the sense of one enriched by experience is essential to an understanding of the meaning of life and essential also to providing compassionate help.

The authors have attempted to cover an ambitious range of such profound issues in a short text, and the result, in my opinion is uneven. The discussion on the politics of the caring professions works well and, not coincidentally, is the longest chapter. Proponents of all persuasions will find their approach stimulating. Essentially they attempt to separate out matters of principle and empirical questions behind the various stances on the Welfare State in what is becoming an increasingly urgent debate in contemporary Britain. On the other hand the discussion on the knowledge base of the professions seems to ignore many important developments associated with writers such as Feyerabend and Lakatos that make their radical separation of the epistemology of natural and social sciences outmoded. Above all their brief but spirited advocacy of literature to educate the professions seems an odd and unsubstantiated conclusion. The last chapter is surely too ambitious in offering a philosopher's approach to an analysis of the meaning of life in 19 pages.

The authors have valiantly and clearly shown how philosophers attempt to throw light on moral and political problems by conceptual clarification. The caring professions confront such dilemmas in specific problems of daily work. I am not convinced that this text has successfully bridged the chasm between conceptual analysis and practice and would like to see philosophers drawn into more specific issues to prove themselves.

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Values in Social Policy: nine contradictions

Jean Hardy, Routledge and Kegan Paul (Radical Social Policy Series), 1981, ix + 132 pp £4.95.

This book explores a series of contrasts which the author sees as central to discussion of the basis of the welfare state and of social work and social policy within it: for example, authority versus liberation, bureaucracy versus professionalism, the individual versus the community. One aim of the book is to help welfare workers to come to terms with conflict, to learn that their work is essentially a field of competing values in which there are no routine answers and personal moral choices have to be made. In many ways it succeeds admirably in its aim: it is clearly written, provocative and reasonably jargon-free, and would form a useful basis for general seminars in most fields of medical work, though it is written with social workers particularly in mind. For its size it has very full notes and bibliography.

I have two main criticisms of *Values in Social Policy*. The first is that it is written in terms of various contrasts which are not themselves explicitly explored, particularly that between capitalism and 'welfare society'. It is assumed throughout that we agree what capitalism is, what its bearings are on other questions raised (for example, on the nature of authority or of the family) and that modern Britain is basically capitalist. Only in the final chapter, 'The personal versus the political', do we get a slightly more extended discussion of capitalism, and this does not inspire confidence. For example, it equates 'rational and economic man' with 'the man who is both educated and with possessions'. This is not what the classical economists meant by the phrase. If Ms Hardy wishes to maintain that their system nevertheless requires such an interpretation, she would need to produce arguments to